

SACRAMENTAL HEALING THROUGH PASTORAL CARE

All of these sacramental healings come together in our faith lives through Spiritual Direction that is faithful to the traditional doctrines and the moral values of Catholic Christianity. Going through the stages of repentance, forgiveness, renunciation, commanding, and blessing, provides us with sacramental healing in every dimension of our private and public lives.

Sacramental healing usually starts with a good and thoroughly honest examination of conscience, and a devout reception of the sacrament of Penance. It then continues with a worthy reception of Holy Communion and may sometimes even include the Anointing of the Sick. Sacramental healing then culminates with a spiritual Plan of Life that functions as a recovery program from sin, and a prayerful path leading forward to even greater holiness of life in Christ. Spiritual Direction guides us through all of these stages of holy healing.

Especially with the guidance of a spiritual director or mentor, we can make better Confessions, and also experience greater inner peace and consolation after Confession as well. The interior change of mind and heart that comes from this healing sacrament can empower us to take the next steps forward in our faith lives. With the accompaniment of a spiritual director or mentor, we can deepen our interior life of healthy faith.

Traditional sacramental healing is a great gift to us from Jesus Christ. It lifts us up and moves us forward in hope toward that ultimate cure which is our resurrection with Christ in glory. Only the seven sacraments can bring this kind of healing to completion in Jesus Christ. That *is* the healing power of Jesus Christ. That *is* the healing power of all his holy sacraments! While each of the seven sacraments have their special roles, our focus is on Penance, Eucharist, and Anointing of the Sick.

Remember that the healing begins the very moment that you turn to Christ in the holy sacraments, where Jesus is waiting for you with open arms and an even more open heart! When was the last time that you came clean with Christ in your life, and made a really good Confession? Why not do it right now?

In Catholic Christianity, spiritual healing comes to us from the sacraments. As an incarnational religion, grace is mediated to us through the sacraments by the will and intent of Christ our Lord. All of the sacraments heal us from the brokenness of our fallen human condition, especially Baptism, in which we are healed of original sin and become a new creation in Christ.

As Saint John the Baptist proclaimed, Christ baptizes us in the Holy Spirit and with fire. The “Holy Spirit” refers to the source of the sacramental grace, and “fire” refers to the transforming power of the sacrament. Thus, when we are sacramentally baptized, it is always in the Holy Spirit and with fire. This is the foundational truth of Catholic Christian baptismal spirituality.

While all of the sacraments provide the reparative therapy of spiritual healing in our lives, the three sacraments that we receive the most often have a special role in our ongoing conversion of life after Baptism. Those three sacraments are Penance, Eucharist, and Anointing, which prepare the way for receiving our ultimate healing on the day of our resurrection.

Pastoral Care promotes health and wellbeing through the grace and the power of all of the sacraments. The signs and wonders of old are still with us today in the sacraments which were instituted by Christ for our salvation. Worthy and devout reception of the sacraments provides fresh outpourings of the Holy Spirit into our lives through the power of Jesus Christ.

While there may be a temporary abatement of symptoms through various healing ministries, the ultimate cure awaits us only in our resurrection on the last day. In the meantime, any respite from redemptive suffering gives us opportunities for further prayer and service to others who are in need. Healings are only temporary, but sacramental cure is truly eternal.

Penance as a Healing Sacrament. All of our problems in life are inevitably spiritual problems at heart. While repentance is an important turning point in our personal lives of faith, Penance provides us with mid-course corrections that keep us steadily turned toward the Lord. Penance is our path to holiness, sanctification, and the pursuit of perfection to which Jesus is calling us. In other words, Penance continues and extends the healing power of the sacrament of Baptism as a form of spiritual First Aid or Urgent Care in our moral lives.

Eucharist as a Healing Sacrament. Called the Medicine of Immortality in early Church writings, it might be said that we receive a spiritual blood transfusion and even a spiritual organ transplant through Holy Communion. Saved by the Blood of Christ shed for us on the Cross, the grace of Jesus' sacrifice flows through the arteries and veins of our souls to allow the oxygen of God's grace to circulate throughout our lives. Redeemed by the Body of Christ on the Cross for us, we receive a new heart and a new spirit within us, as foretold by Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Our broken and hardened hearts are healed by the loving Heart of Jesus in us. In other words, the Eucharist continues and extends the healing power of the sacrament of Baptism as a saving form of spiritual medication that we should receive worthily, often, and well, in our sacramental reception of Holy Communion.

Anointing of the Sick as a Healing Sacrament. As Christ was anointed before his Passion, we are anointed to become more like Christ in offering our sufferings to God as the spiritual labor pains of eternal life. Suffering is sadly unavoidable due to our fallen human condition, but our suffering becomes redemptive when we prayerfully unite our pain to that of Christ on the Cross. In other words, Anointing continues and extends the healing power of the sacrament of Baptism as a form of spiritual preparation for physical death and its ultimate cure, our resurrection from the dead in Christ.

So, are you suffering morally? Healing comes through the Sacrament of Penance. Are you suffering spiritually? Healing comes through the Sacrament of the Eucharist. Are you suffering physically? Healing comes through the Sacrament of Anointing. Accept no substitutes for the divine healing that truly comes to us through the holy sacraments of the Church!

In order to allow the sacraments to be fruitful in our lives, we must worthily prepare for receiving them. For Penance, we must examine our consciences and have a firm purpose of amendment. For the Eucharist, we must be absolved from serious sin through sacramental Confession and fast for at least an hour beforehand. These preparations are well-known and the more devoutly we apply them, the greater the benefit.

There are important preparations for the fruitful reception of the sacrament of Anointing as well. When we have applied the natural therapies of modern medicine and psychotherapy, we understand our mortality and our fallen human condition ever more vividly. As grace builds upon nature, the spiritual therapy of Anointing builds upon the natural therapies just noted.

Sacramental healing is not an alternative to, nor a substitute for, the natural therapies that are readily available to us. The healing sacraments bring comfort to our souls in such a way that not only assists the natural healing remedies of medicine and psychotherapy, but completes what they began, and takes them to a new level of grace. In other words, these three therapies are quite complementary and mutually beneficial.

When all is said and done, sacramental healing is what salvation is all about. Even the root of the word "salvation" is the "salve" of a healing balm. Thus, salvation is the ultimate cure for all that ails us. As forgiven sinners, we receive the gift of salvific healing through the sacraments of Christ. Thus, all spiritual healing is fundamentally and ultimately sacramental.